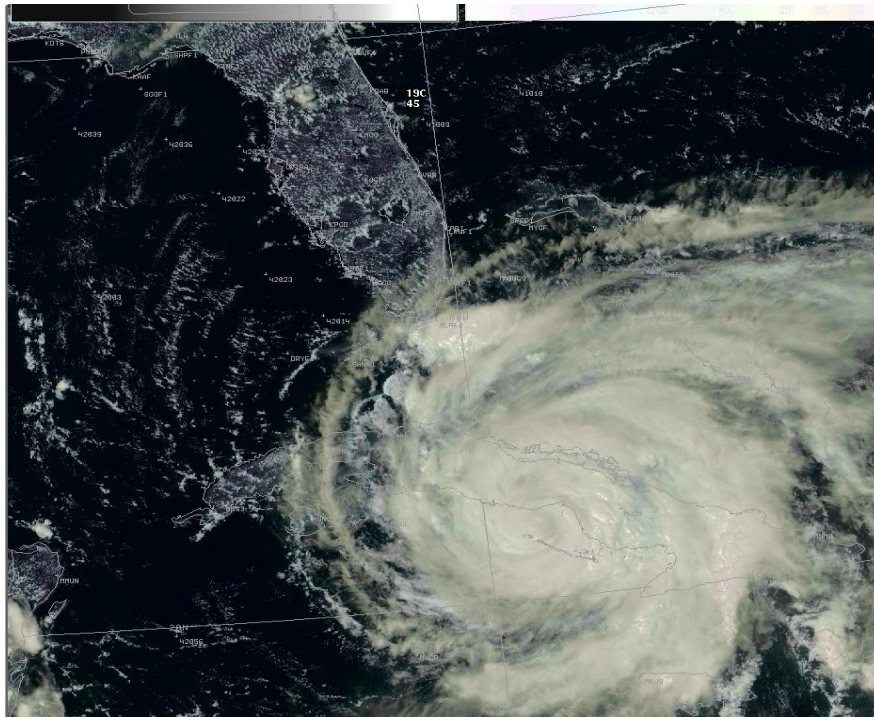




NOAA, NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE, WEATHER FORECAST OFFICE

Miami, Florida 33165



Hurricane Ike passing south of Florida in September 2008

Thursday February 3: Hurricane and Flooding Awareness Day

2010 marked the fifth consecutive year in which south Florida escaped major impacts from hurricanes. The only direct impact from a tropical system occurred on July 23 when Tropical Storm Bonnie moved through south Florida, producing only minor impacts in the form of heavy rainfall and very minor wind damage.

Despite the quiet tropical season south Florida experienced in 2010, the fact remains that south Florida, statistically speaking, is the most hurricane-prone part of the United

States. This means that we should be prepared every for the possibility of a tropical storm or hurricane impacting our region.

The lack of south Florida hurricanes the past 5 years follows two active years in 2004 and 2005. These cycles of active and inactive years are quite typical of historical tropical cyclone patterns observed in south Florida. South Florida has gone as long as 27 years between direct hurricane strikes. On average, the center of a hurricane will pass within 65 miles of the southeast Florida coast every 4 to 6 years. For the southwest coast and interior sections around Lake Okeechobee, the average is once every 8 to 9 years. This means that while hurricane strikes are typically not a yearly occurrence, south Florida will at least be significantly threatened a few times a decade, and impacted directly by a hurricane at least once a decade.

Regardless of the short or long term hurricane outlook, South Floridians need to be prepared every year. While the extremely active hurricane seasons of 2004 and 2005 will rarely be repeated, it only takes one big storm to affect our area for long lasting impacts to be felt. Now is the time to begin preparing for the 2010 hurricane season. Develop a plan and have it in place before a storm threatens. Know if you live in a hurricane evacuation. Gather supplies such as bottled water, canned foods and batteries. Remember to buy enough provisions to last a minimum of three to five days in the event of a tropical system affecting our area. Buy and install hurricane shutters. A minimum of preparation can save lives and property.

Remember: It doesn't take a major hurricane to produce significant impacts. Tropical storms directly impacting south Florida have been known to produce severe flooding, damaging winds and tornadoes. Take every tropical cyclone seriously, whether it's a tropical storm or a major hurricane.

It is also important to note that tropical storms and hurricanes are multiple hazard events. While the wind speed is what determines the classification of a tropical cyclone, other storm hazards such as tornadoes, flooding rains, storm surge and pounding surf are just as significant and need to be taken seriously. Historically, it is the water that causes most of the deaths in hurricanes. About 90 percent of all hurricane-related deaths occur from drowning from either the storm surge or freshwater flooding. The threat from storm surge is particularly high along south Florida's coasts, and residents of coastal areas are urged to heed advice from local officials and evacuate when a hurricane threatens.

People are also urged to be extremely cautious during the storm's aftermath. After Hurricane Wilma in 2005, 30 people died after the storm's passage from a combination of factors including carbon monoxide poisoning, injuries while removing debris and vehicle accidents. Extreme care must be used when using generators, and make sure to run them in an outdoor location, not inside the house.



Severe Flooding in Hallandale Beach on December 18, 2009 (photo courtesy AP/Amy Beth Bennett)

Flooding

South Florida's occasional heavy rains and flat terrain often lead to flooding. While tropical weather systems produce most of the very heavy and widespread rain events, flooding can also occur from non-tropical related weather systems. Two events in 2009 underscore this: the June 5th severe thunderstorm on Miami Beach that dumped over 9 inches of rain in less than three hours and led to severe flooding; and the December 17th torrential downpour in southeast Broward and northeast Miami-Dade counties that produced anywhere from 8 to 14 inches of rain in about 6 hours, leading to severe flooding of over 80 structures in Broward County and numerous streets under several feet of water. While the magnitude of the December 17th event is one that very rarely occurs, rainfall events which produce anywhere from 6 to 8 inches of rain in a short amount of time and lead to severe local flooding occur at least two or three times a year over south Florida.

The flat south Florida terrain lends itself to ponding of water in poorly drained or low lying areas during heavy rain events, rather than the flash flooding that occurs in other parts of the country. While this type of flooding is less deadly or destructive, it can cause significant impacts as water can enter homes and other structures, as well as make driving extremely hazardous due to flooded roadways which can sometimes obscure

canals. If water is covering a roadway, do not assume that you can drive through it. Turn around, don't drown.

Fortunately, people can also plan well in advance for floods. The best advice is to have flood insurance, a separate policy from your homeowners insurance. Know if you live in an area that floods frequently from heavy rains.

Monitor NOAA Weather Radio before, during and after an tropical and flood event to stay abreast of the latest information. You can also visit the National Weather Service Miami Forecast Office web site at weather.gov/southflorida where the latest hurricane and flood watches and warnings will be available, as well as the National Hurricane Center's five-day tropical cyclone track and intensity forecast.